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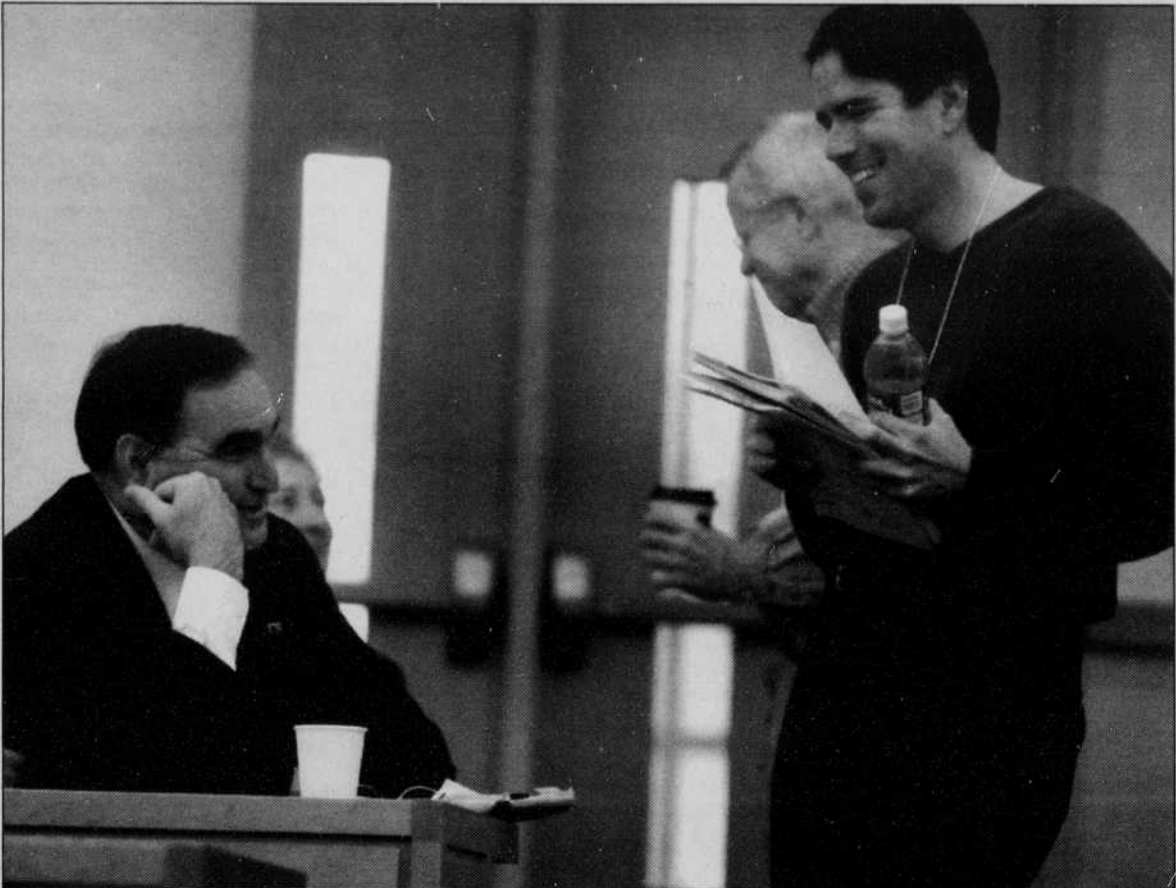
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University School of Law Professor Steve Bender (right) talks with judge Paul J. De Muniz before his CODAC lecture on Saturday.

# Diversity ruling addressed in campus CODAC summit

The Center on Diversity and Community examined affirmative action and the changing face of campus

By Nika Carlson  
 Freelance Reporter

A lecture room full of 120 students and campus and community leaders sat silent with grave faces as an elderly man broke into tears, saying the goals of affirmative action would not move forward until he and his generation were dead.

The Center on Diversity and Community hosted a summit on Saturday to discuss the June U.S. Supreme Court ruling, which said that public universities have a "compelling interest in diversity."

The court determined that it is legal to consider race or ethnicity in the university admission's process when done in an individualized and flexible way. The two decisions were the first Supreme Court deliberations of affirmative action in 25 years.

Speakers at Saturday's event focused on the possible effects of the ruling and what they might mean for the future of racial equality.

The summit's keynote speaker, Oregon Supreme Court Judge Paul J. De Muniz, said the educational benefits of diversity are substantial. He added that diversity promotes learning and better prepares students for an "increasingly global world" by exposing them to "widely diverse people, cultures and ideas."

ASUO President Maddy Melton agreed.

"Diversity enriches all our educations," Melton said. "I think my opinion would take that one further. We're also still making up for being historically and currently discriminatory. I think (affirmative action) is a necessary thing."

The University does not currently have an affirmative action policy for undergraduate admissions.

The 12 speakers at the conference said that despite growth in nationwide minority populations, people of color continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions and overrepresented in prisons and school drop-out statistics.

In 2002, the nationwide minority population was at almost 20 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. By 2050, the Bureau projects the percentage will jump to almost

half the population.

In spring 2003, 12.6 percent of University undergraduates identified themselves as an ethnic minority, up from 12.3 percent in spring 1995, according to the University Office of the Registrar.

The changing face of the nation's population had many of the conference speakers challenging members of the audience to examine their own relationship with diversity.

"If we're talking about affirmative action and not talking about the system that creates the need for it, nothing will change," said Samuel Brooks, a member of the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs.

Brooks was not alone in saying it would take more than affirmative action to solve the country's diversity issues.

"The debate over affirmative action is far from settled," De Muniz said.

De Muniz added that the decisions made by the Supreme Court "reaffirmed what all of us in America know to be true: Race unfortunately still matters."

Nika Carlson is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.



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